

ROSE COGHLAN'S 50 YEARS ON THE STAGE



Famous Actress Credits Her Handsome Irish Papa With Her Looks and Disposition—Made Her Debut as One of Macbeth's Witches

This is the first instalment of the life history of Rose Coghlan, including over fifty years of stage experience and embodying many interesting episodes in the career of her brother, Charles F. Coghlan, written by herself.

CHAPTER I.

I HAVE noticed in reading the autobiographies of celebrities that they generally commence from the date of their debut. I have gone further back and commenced before I was born.

My mother met my father when he was on a short visit to Jersey. She was a typical Jersey girl, with large hazel eyes, neither blue nor brown; fair complexion, rosy cheeks, plump and pleasing. No wonder my father, a man of the world around forty, fell an easy victim. A proposal followed after a day's fishing, where she had baited his hook and unknowingly here at the same time. She was fascinated, but her family put him through a cross-examination. "Was he married?" Also they wanted to know the history of his family. He replied that he wished to marry their daughter and not her family. Their answer to this was a dismissal, so he left Jersey and did not return for two years, when my mother was eighteen.

Then followed a secret marriage in

Guernsey, another of the Channel Islands, in the year 1841. Mr. Coghlan took his young bride to Paris, and she was supremely happy when her son, Charles Francis, was born, June 10, 1842. During the ensuing seven years she was a great traveller. Mr. Coghlan was the originator and author of Coghlan's Continental Guides, then the best if not the only guide in Continental Europe. His income was large, and mother and little Charles travelled with him. They started on his business tour in a carriage, drawn by four horses, and a postillion. They stopped at the best hotels and sometimes Mrs. Coghlan and the child remained for a short rest. She loved Switzerland, and I remember her telling me of meeting at Bern a daughter of her husband, where she learned for the first time that he had been married before. This was a great surprise to her. When her second son, Frank, joined the party in 1849, mother rebelled and wanted to settle down in a home of her own with her children. She did not attain her wish until 1851, when a house was taken in Peterborough, Lincolnshire, where to the two brothers was presented a sister, myself, Rose Coghlan, born March, 1851, the London Exhibition year. Therefore, I was an exhibition baby! I just escaped being a daughter of St. Patrick's, being born on the 18th at 1 o'clock in the morning.

What occurred during the first three years of my life is an utter blank. My first recollections are of my grandmother Kirby's home in Jersey, one of the Channel Islands of Great Britain, where mother, Frank and I were living. From hearsay I learned later that Charles was abroad with his father, who had left us in Peterborough in a terrible rage. He was an Irishman and I am convinced that he endowed me with some of his temper as well as his good looks.

This separation was because my mother refused to travel with him or agree to leave her children at home with a matron. They were ever first with her. She had to consent to father's taking his eldest son abroad, but determined to return to her home in Jersey with the two younger children. After a few months there she decided that we could no longer remain a burden to her mother, who had little but her home and her pension as an officer's widow. As mother had not been receiving any funds from my father, she secured a position in a finishing school in Cheltenham, England, and arranged to take me with her, my board to go as part of her salary. I was then five years old. My brother Frank was placed in a boarding school.

We remained in Cheltenham about two years, when my mother's brothers, the Rev. Walter Kirby and Dr. Edmund Kirby of London, suggested that my mother should take a house there and open a finishing school herself, and both would help her with their influence to procure a select clientele. To this home she brought my brother Frank. He arrived and the next day he developed an attack of measles.

ROSE COGHLAN'S MOTHER—ANNA MARIA KIRBY

Mother thought it wiser to put me in the same room, as most probably I would not escape it. I was happy that we were too weak to fight, which was our usual entertainment, as he loved to play the part of big brother and boss. The school prospered and we were happy but for my mother's constant longing for her absent son Charles, who was still with his father.

Earliest Recollections of Father.

I first recollect seeing my father on my eighth birthday, when my mother was giving a party. I can visualize that party dress—white net over white silk looped up with pink rosebuds. The doors opened and the beaming face of a handsome elderly gentleman appeared in the aperture, and he threw in among us oranges, candy and nuts, and, catching me up in his arms, whispered, "Kiss Papa!"

My father's temper having cooled off in these five years of separation, no doubt he felt a longing for his family,

and glued on them these painted figures. I retained that set for years. They were admired by artists, but in one of my many moves I lost them. I mention this because Charles was a wonderfully talented youth and might have made a name in several professions—playwright, producer, actor, musician, painter and linguist.

During the short stay in the law office he was very unhappy. It was no use, he had imbibed too much of the theatrical atmosphere in Paris. Not wishing to disobey his father by becoming an actor he compromised and wrote a play, a five act blank verse tragedy, entitled, "Love and Hate, or the Court of Charles First," which my father on one of his visits was persuaded to read and was so amazed at what he considered his son's genius that he engaged the old St. Martin's Hall for a reading, hired a costume of Charles First and invited a number of his friends, several literary lights including among them Charles Read, John Oxenford and Bulwer Lytton, to hear it. Their opinions were unanimous that he was greatly gifted and should be allowed to follow his own bent in his choice of a profession. His father's objections were overcome and Charles was permitted to choose his own career.

Charles lived with us and went to his office daily. It was agony to him. I learned to love him dearly. Being nine years older than I Charles was too much of a gentleman to fight with a lady, and I appreciated his good man-



ELLEN TERRY ONE OF HER EARLIEST PICTURES.

And my mother, womanlike, received him as though nothing had happened. No sooner was this greeting over than we had another surprise. There now appeared in the doorway a tall, lanky, long haired, scrawny youth, my brother, Charles F. Coghlan, who had brought him to London and was very proud of him. He taught me to play chess, and, having only a set of drafts, he turned them into chessmen, painting on stiff cardboard soldiers for the pawns, knights on horseback, medieval castles, bishops in their robes, gorgeous kings and queens. These drafts he cut in half

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Charles Falls in Love With Patti.

The young man was so overjoyed that he accomplished two things, the first being to fall in love with the great Adeline Patti, then in the zenith of her beauty. He wrote sonnets to her eyebrows, enshrined her picture on his mantle, and continued to go once a week to the opera in the gallery. At the same time he searched for and obtained an engagement as an actor at the Haymarket Theatre, which was owned and managed by John Baldwin Buckstone, father of our Roland Buckstone. Mr. Buckstone was considered the best comedian of that period and produced extravaganzas, which was the happy medium between burlesque and comic opera. Charles obtained the engagement through his knowledge and fine accent of French.

In the play there were four heralds, Italian, French, Spanish and German. They had one entrance only, which they made on hobbyhorses; each spoke a verse in his own language and they danced a quadrille on their own legs with their false ones dangling over the side of the mal' believe horses. This was his debut in 1859. He took me

with him when he went to receive his first salary, then sent me with a friend of his to see the play, after which I made my first entrance through a stage door to wait for my brother to take me home. That night I had my first glimpse of the stage. How I laughed at my brother when he dived with his hobbyhorse, and when the transformation scene opened up I went crazy with delight over its crystal lights, silver tissue and beautiful angels dangling among the stars in long skirts of gauze. Even the ballet skirt in those days reached to the ankle. Nowadays, it seems, all skirts are Hooverized.

All that night I dreamed of fairies, knights and jewels, and awoke with the determination to become an actress, a determination that has never left me.

At the close of that extravaganza Charles left Mr. Buckstone's company at the Haymarket Theatre and decided that London was no place for him in the profession he had chosen. He looked for a position where he would have plenty of practice in every kind of part by engaging himself as utility man, which means he might be called on to play a heavy villain, an old man or a servant with a few spoken words. Such a position he obtained in the Theatre Royal, Dublin, and vowed never to return to London until he could be recognized as an artist.

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Charles Coghlan had become a great favorite in Hull, and here my father decided to pay us a visit to witness his success. We lived in furnished rooms, a great institution for the actor. You paid for your sitting room and bedrooms and did your own marketing. The slavey, as the houseworker then was called, cooked your joint, or whatever you provided, and served it in your sitting room. This comfort is still being enjoyed in England, but has never even been thought of in America.

At the theatre there were only six performances a week—no matinees. The bill generally consisted either of a long classical play, followed or preceded by a farce, or possibly a one act playlet followed by a three act drama or comedy, and the bill was closed by a burlesque. The performances were long, beginning at 7 o'clock and ending at 11. The actors were engaged each for a special line of business in much play as the old comedies, also Shakespeare's and the classical dramas.

There seldom was a new play produced, owing perhaps to the dearth of dramatic authors or possibly it was due to the lack of revenue they received. That was the condition in the '50s and '60s. They had a system of visiting stars during the whole season with exception of the holidays, when a pantomime was produced each year.

Continued on Ninth Page.